

BEFORE THE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION OF SOUTH CAROLINA
[Greenville, South Carolina]

HEARING # 20-11857

FEBRUARY 13, 2020

6:00 P.M.

DOCKET NO. 2019-290-WS:

Blue Granite Water Company - Application for Approval to Adjust
Rate Schedules and Increase Rates

TRANSCRIPT OF TESTIMONY
AND PROCEEDINGS

VOLUME 4 OF 10

HEARING BEFORE: Comer H. 'Randy' RANDALL, *Chairman*; Florence
P. BELSER, *Interim Vice Chairman*; and COMMISSIONERS John
E. 'Butch' HOWARD, Thomas J. 'Tom' ERVIN, Swain E.
WHITFIELD, and O'Neal HAMILTON

ADVISOR TO COMMISSION: Jo Anne Wessinger Hill, Esq.
Legal Advisory Staff

STAFF: William O. Richardson and Amanda Golebiowski, Technical
Advisory Staff; Patricia Stephens and Afton Ellison, Clerk's Staff;
Rob Bockman, Public Information Officer; and Jo Elizabeth M. Wheat,
CVR-CM/M-GNSC, Court Reporter

APPEARANCES:

SAMUEL J. WELLBORN, ESQUIRE, representing BLUE
GRANITE WATER COMPANY, APPLICANT

**LAURA R. 'BECKY' DOVER, ESQUIRE, and ROBERT
HALL, ESQUIRE**, representing the SOUTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS, INTERVENOR

**CHRISTOPHER M. HUBER, ESQUIRE, and STEVE HAMM,
ESQUIRE**, representing the SOUTH CAROLINA OFFICE OF
REGULATORY STAFF

PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION OF SOUTH CAROLINA

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P R O C E E D I N G S

CHAIRMAN RANDALL: Good evening, everyone.

Welcome to tonight's hearing. We're glad to see folks out tonight. We're glad the rain stopped, so you can travel a little easier. Tonight is your night so we can hear what you've got to say.

Before we begin, I want to introduce the Commission, the Commissioners who are here. To my far left, Commissioner Butch Howard, representing District 1; next to him, O'Neal Hamilton, representing District 7; our attorney, Ms. Jo Anne Wessinger Hill. To my far right, Commissioner Florence Belser, representing District 2; Commissioner Tom Ervin, representing District 4. Commissioner Williams, from District 6, is currently serving our country in Iraq. And I'm Randy Randall; I represent District 3.

We'll now take appearances from the parties. Did I leave somebody out, Swain?

COMMISSIONER WHITFIELD: It's quite all right.

CHAIRMAN RANDALL: And Commissioner Swain Whitfield, from District 5.

I do at least one of those every night, so that's not unusual.

MR. WELLBORN: Mr. Chairman, good evening. On

1 behalf of the company, I'm Sam Wellborn. And if I
2 may, at this time, we also have from the company
3 Mr. Bryce Mendenhall who is Vice President of
4 Operations for the company, along with his staff
5 from the company, so I would encourage members of
6 the public, if there's an issue or a service-
7 related problem that needs addressing by the
8 company, that you come over and speak with his
9 staff.

10 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

11 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you.

12 **MR. HUBER:** Chris Huber, here for the Office
13 of Regulatory Staff, with Attorney Steve Hamm. And
14 I'm going to introduce a few other folks that are
15 here from our office in a few minutes.

16 **MR. HALL:** Good evening. Roger Hall and Becky
17 Dover, with the Department of Consumer Affairs. We
18 are Consumer Advocates; we're here to hear from the
19 ratepayers so we can better advocate for you all at
20 the Public Service Commission.

21 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** From now on, we need you to
22 speak into the microphone, sir, so Ms. Wheat can
23 hear.

24 **MR. HALL:** Sorry about that. Do I need to
25 press this [indicating]?

1 **COMMISSIONER BELSER:** It's on.

2 **MR. HALL:** Can you hear me now? Okay. Roger
3 Hall and Becky Dover, with the Department of
4 Consumer Affairs. We are both Assistant Consumer
5 Advocates. We've intervened in the matter in order
6 to represent the interests of the consumer. We're
7 here tonight to listen to what the local ratepayers
8 have to say so we can better advocate for them.
9 Thank you.

10 **VOICE:** You need to speak into the mic,
11 please.

12 **VOICE:** We didn't hear you.

13 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Stay seated and get it down
14 in front of you.

15 **MR. HALL:** Sorry about that. Can you hear me?

16 **VOICE:** Yes, now.

17 **MR. HALL:** All right. We are – I'm Roger
18 Hall. This is Becky Dover [indicating]. We are
19 with the Department of Consumer –

20 **COMMISSIONER BELSER:** Talk into the
21 microphone.

22 **MR. HALL:** We are with the Department of
23 Consumer Affairs. We are Assistant Consumer
24 Advocates. We have intervened in the matter in
25 order to represent the consumer interest. So we're

1 here tonight to listen to what the local ratepayers
2 have to say, so that we can better advocate for you
3 in front of the Commission.

4 **VOICE:** Thank you.

5 **MR. HALL:** You're welcome.

6 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you.

7 **COMMISSIONER BELSER:** Thank you.

8 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Okay. We'll turn it over
9 for the ORS talk.

10 **MR. HUBER:** I think I can speak loud enough so
11 everybody can hear me. Thank you, Mr. Chairman,
12 again.

13 And thank everyone for coming out tonight.
14 Again, my name is Chris Huber, and I'm going to
15 spend a few minutes talking about the process for
16 this hearing tonight. And, again, I'm an attorney
17 with the Office of Regulatory Staff. I'm going to
18 introduce a few more people from our office that
19 are here tonight in a few minutes.

20 The Public Service Commission is hosting this
21 hearing tonight. The agency I work with – the
22 Office of Regulatory Staff – is a separate State
23 agency from the Commission. You'll hear the Office
24 of Regulatory Staff referred to by its acronym
25 "ORS."

1 The Commission is charged with making the
2 final decision on the Application. ORS is charged
3 with representing the public interest and making
4 recommendations to the Commission.

5 The hearing is for you to share your thoughts
6 about Blue Granite Water Company's request to
7 increase its rates. The Commission scheduled this
8 hearing tonight because they know that this is a
9 significant matter and they want to hear from you.
10 What you have to say is important.

11 Please know that, if you speak tonight, what
12 you say becomes part of the official record in the
13 case. Your testimony will be sworn and will
14 recorded by the court reporter, Ms. Mary Jo Wheat.
15 The Commission will keep in mind what you say when
16 they deliberate and make a decision in this case.
17 All the parties will present testimony and evidence
18 to the Commission during the merits hearing, which
19 will be held beginning at 10 a.m. on Wednesday,
20 February 26th. The final decision in the case will
21 be issued by the Commission sometime in early –
22 April 2nd.

23 If you speak tonight, I may ask you some
24 questions; likewise, the attorneys for the other
25 parties may ask you some questions. The

Commissioners may also ask you some questions. Please don't get offended if we do. It's simply because we want to learn more about what you have said. On the other hand, please do not be offended if we do not ask you questions. Tonight is primarily about hearing what you have to say.

As to the Commission, the Commissioners and the Commission Staff are required to follow the same rules as a judge. They are prohibited by law from answering questions, so please don't get frustrated if you state questions during your testimony and there are no answers.

With me tonight from the Office of Regulatory Staff is Dan Hunnel from our Utility Rates Department. Also from ORS, outside in the lobby, is Sarah Wilhite with our Consumer Affairs Department. You're welcome to talk to Ms. Wilhite right now or at any time during the hearing tonight. If you prefer to talk to myself or my co-counsel, Mr. Steve Hamm, you can stick around after the hearing and we'll be happy to talk to you for as long as it takes. Of course, I cannot answer questions while testimony is being taken, but after all the testimony is taken we'll be happy to speak with you.

1 If you'd like to contact our agency later, you
2 can leave a message and we will call you back.

3 Please remember that we are all here to listen
4 to you tonight. During the three-minute allotment
5 of time, in which you will be treated with courtesy
6 and respect, in turn we please ask that you be
7 considerate and respectful to the Commission as you
8 direct your remarks to them.

9 Thank you, everyone, for being here, and thank
10 you for your attention during these opening
11 remarks.

12 I would like to mention there are a couple of
13 upcoming hearings. There's one in York on February
14 20th, and also there will be another night hearing
15 on February 27th, at the Commission hearing room in
16 Columbia. But you can only speak once, so if you
17 are considering speaking at a later hearing, please
18 keep in mind if you speak tonight, you cannot speak
19 at a later hearing.

20 I wanted to give a brief overview of the rate
21 case, as well, that's in front of the Commission.
22 The company has asked for a 35 to 55 percent
23 increase in water rates and a 56 percent increase
24 in sewer rates. In particular, the company has
25 requested to add a purchased-water and purchased-

1 sewer charge to customers' bills, to change the
2 value of its depreciation, to add a surcharge to
3 customers' bills for a storm reserve fund, to allow
4 customers to round up their payments to the nearest
5 dollar, with the funds to be directed to community
6 action agencies to assist low-income customers with
7 their water and sewer bills, and also to be allowed
8 the opportunity to earn a profit for its
9 shareholders of 10.25 percent.

10 ORS have filed testimony seeking, among other
11 things, to reduce the company's requested revenue
12 increase by a little over \$3 million.

13 Mr. Chairman, turning back to you, I would ask
14 that tonight's sign-in sheets be marked and entered
15 into the record as an exhibit. Thank you.

16 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you. The sign-in
17 sheets will be entered as Hearing Exhibit No. 10.

18 Okay. Thank you, Mr. Huber. I'm going to
19 turn it over now to Ms. Wessinger Hill.

20 **MS. HILL:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members
21 of the Commission.

22 Good evening, again, and on behalf of the
23 Commission and Staff, we'd like to thank everyone
24 for coming out to the public hearing. My name is
25 Jo Anne Wessinger Hill, and I'm a Staff lawyer for

1 the Commission.

2 This proceeding before the Commission is under
3 Docket No. 2019-290-WS. And as you've heard a
4 little bit about it, it concerns rate increases
5 filed with the Commission by Blue Granite Water
6 Company.

7 Before we begin, there are a few additional
8 preliminary matters that we need to clarify, also.
9 Even though this is not a courtroom that you would
10 fine at the Greenville County Courthouse, it is a
11 court proceeding. As we mentioned before, Ms.
12 Wheat is our court reporter, and she is right here
13 at the end, with the mask on, and she's recording
14 everything just as if you were sitting in the
15 Greenville County Courthouse or at another
16 courthouse proceeding. Okay?

17 Only the persons who have signed up tonight
18 are going to be allowed to speak, and Mr. Bockman
19 is over there [indicating] and he's going to be
20 calling your names, and he'll tell you actually
21 when to come up, and we've got a podium for you to
22 actually speak from.

23 Down below the podium over here [indicating]
24 is Mr. Richardson, and there is a clock right by
25 him that has a three-minute timer on it. When that

1 timer goes off, you'll hear a buzzer and that means
2 your three minutes is up. And the reason we have
3 the three minutes is so that everyone gets the
4 opportunity to speak. You'll be able to see it
5 from the podium, so you can adjust your testimony
6 accordingly.

7 Whenever you come up to the podium, remember
8 you need to – you're going to be sworn in first,
9 and you need to give your name and the subdivision
10 or town that you live in. You don't need to give
11 your house number or street number, because the
12 transcript of this proceeding is going to be placed
13 into the record and it will be, as required by law,
14 and so we don't want your personal, private
15 information listed on there. Also please confirm
16 that you're a customer of Blue Granite Water
17 Company and for what services. Then you can
18 proceed to go ahead and tell the Commission what
19 you believe is your truth and testimony with regard
20 to this matter.

21 Please make sure you speak into the microphone
22 and please wait for any clarifying questions any of
23 the parties may have.

24 You've already been referenced that we've got
25 some additional public hearings coming up, as well

1 as the hearing, where the company – you’ve heard it
2 called “merits hearing”? It’s when the company’s
3 and Department of – the ORS and the Department of
4 Consumer Affairs and anyone else intervening as a
5 party will actually get to put their case, their
6 side of the story up for you to hear. Anyone can
7 have access to that by going onto the Public
8 Service Commission website and clicking, once you
9 get on the webpage – which is at www.psc.sc.gov –
10 you’ll see a tab that says “Livestream.” You can
11 actually livestream that, and the hearing will
12 actually begin at 10 a.m. on Wednesday, February
13 26th, and will continue until it is concluded.
14 That may be Thursday, Friday, Monday, or Tuesday of
15 the following week.

16 We ask that you please silence your cell
17 phones, so that everyone can hear – particularly
18 Ms. Wheat – because this is a court proceeding.
19 Also, the testimony that you’re providing tonight,
20 you can only get one chance to actually testify; if
21 you’ve already testified at any of the three prior
22 hearings that have been held, you cannot testify
23 again. And you will not be able, if you testify
24 tonight, be able to testify at the upcoming hearing
25 in York or either the one that’s going to be held

1 in Columbia on February 27th.

2 I do want to remind you one more time that, as
3 Mr. Huber mentioned, the Commission itself is
4 sitting up here; they are what you call a quasi-
5 judicial body, which means they are judges. They
6 are sitting as judges. And you've already been
7 told, as well, that they've got to comply with the
8 Rules of Judicial Conduct and all the laws passed
9 by the General Assembly. Just like any witness
10 called in trial, if you have a question, you can't
11 ask the judge the question. Even if the judge
12 wanted to answer the question or clarify anything
13 that was said, they are prohibited from doing so.

14 And with that, Mr. Chairman, the docket is in
15 order and we're ready to proceed.

16 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you.

17 Okay. Mr. Bockman, if you'll begin calling
18 the first person.

19 **MR. BOCKMAN:** Absolutely. Signed up first we
20 have Wendy Trommer? Wendy Trommer, followed by
21 Bobbie Lyons and Virginia Gray. If Bobbie Lyons
22 and Virginia Gray would like to take the seats
23 behind Ms. Trommer, here [indicating]? Thank you.

24 [Witness affirmed]

25 <

1 THEREUPON came,

2 W E N D Y T R O M M E R ,

3 who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

4 WITNESS: My name is Wendy Trommer, and I live
5 in Lake Trollingwood.

6 Since 2013, when I moved here from New
7 Hampshire, this utility has had multiple rate
8 increases. Every year and a half or so, I get
9 something in the mail asking for a rate increase.
10 Also, and since we've been here since 2013, there
11 have been three name changes to this company. They
12 were United Utilities or Utilities, Inc., and then
13 Carolina Water, and then Blue Granite Water. When
14 I inquired if the company had been sold, I was told
15 that, no, they just changed their name. I've
16 worked in industry for a long time, and I know that
17 name changes, with the inherent – you've got to
18 change your logos; you've got to change your
19 vehicles; you've got to change everything. It
20 costs millions of dollars, so it makes no sense to
21 me that we're asking for rate increases and
22 changing our name on a regular basis.

23 The community that this – the communities that
24 are served by Blue Granite Water are rural, poor,
25 blue-collar, and retirees, for the most part, at

1 least in this area. These people cannot afford
2 rate increases of this magnitude. These rate
3 increases are higher, much higher, than the cost of
4 living, and many of them are on fixed incomes.
5 Pensions don't raise, Social Security doesn't
6 raise – not much, and certainly not that much.

7 The second issue that – the third issue – the
8 other issue I have is that it's a flat rate for
9 sewer, where most water companies, like Greenville
10 Water and other water companies that I have
11 experienced in the past, living in other states,
12 charge an outflow rate, so whatever water you use
13 coming in is what you get charged for sewer. This
14 flat rate is exorbitantly high.

15 I am one person in my household. I get to pay
16 the same rate for sewer as somebody who has five
17 children and doing 15 or 20 loads of laundry a
18 week. That is outrageous. I am on a fixed income.

19 Another issue is, one of my neighbors – he's
20 not here tonight and I can only try to speak for
21 him – he got a water bill last year, actually two
22 water bills, where he was using in excess of
23 20-30,000 gallons of water a day. So he called
24 Blue Granite Water and he said, "I think we have a
25 problem here. It's just my wife and I. We're not

1 using this kind of water.” Blue Granite Water
2 said, “Check for a leak.” He did; there was no
3 leak. He asked them for help, and he told them
4 that they needed to pay the bill. It was – it was
5 callous. Just callous disregard.

6 Some of my neighbors have Greenville Water and
7 Blue Granite sewer; their water bill – their sewer
8 bill is three times their water bill. This increase
9 is profit-oriented and greedy. Ten percent for the
10 shareholders sounds reasonable, but not on the backs
11 of the poor people that are having to pay it.

12 Thank you.

13 [Applause]

14 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, Ms. Trommer.

15 Any questions from the company?

16 **MR. WELLBORN:** No, sir.

17 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Anyone, ORS?

18 **MR. HUBER:** No, sir.

19 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Commissioners, any
20 questions. Commissioner Belser.

21 **EXAMINATION**

22 **BY COMMISSIONER BELSER:**

23 **Q** Hi. Ms. Trammer?

24 **A** Trommer.

25 **Q** Trommer. Thank you for being here tonight. Tell me

1 your subdivision again?

2 **A** We are Lake Trollingwood, Incorporated. We're off Reedy
3 Fork Road.

4 **Q** And who is your water provider?

5 **A** Blue Granite is both my water and sewer provider.

6 **Q** And you're still being charged a flat rate?

7 **A** Oh, we've been charged a flat rate ever since we've been
8 down here, that's true.

9 **Q** And your neighbor that got the bill, the high bill, he's
10 also a Blue Granite water and sewer customer?

11 **A** He was with Blue Granite Water Company until about a
12 month ago, when he was able to switch over to Greenville
13 Water, but not everyone in our subdivision can.

14 **Q** Thank you very much. I appreciate it.

15 **A** You're welcome.

16 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you.

17 Commissioners, any other questions?

18 [No response]

19 **MR. WELLBORN:** Pardon me, Mr. Chairman.

20 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Yes, sir, Mr. Wellborn.

21 **MR. WELLBORN:** If I may ask just a clarifying
22 question.

23 **CROSS EXAMINATION**

24 **BY MR. WELLBORN:**

25 **Q** Is your water bill – is that volumetric or is that a

1 flat rate?

2 **A** It is volumetric, but then there is a twenty- – I think
3 a \$28 flat-rate fee on top of that.

4 **Q** And your sewer charge is a flat rate?

5 **A** It is a flat rate right now. I think it's \$68-
6 something.

7 **MR. WELLBORN:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

8 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you.

9 Any other questions?

10 [No response]

11 Thank you, ma'am.

12 [WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

13 **MR. BOCKMAN:** Next we have Bobbie Lyons,
14 followed by Virginia Gray. Bobbie Lyons, Virginia
15 Gray, and Andy Lawrence.

16 [Witness affirmed]

17 THEREUPON came,

18 **B O B B I E L Y O N S ,**

19 who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

20 **WITNESS:** My name is Bobbie Lyons, and I'm in
21 the Canterbury subdivision, down in South
22 Greenville.

23 And I'm here to talk about the sewage and the
24 amount that we're being charged. And we're not – I
25 know, for my home – I think I've addressed this

1 before. We often have issues with the sewage.
2 Just last month, the sewage came into our home. So
3 my husband had to run down to the waste station to
4 get someone to come up there right quick, because
5 it's not that far from where we live, and the guy
6 came up, and he said, "Well, it's not an issue on
7 your side; it's an issue on our side, so we're
8 going to have to call Roto-Rooter to pump it out."

9 And, okay, so they do that, but they don't
10 come back and say, "Okay, we're sorry," or, "What
11 can we do to fix this problem that, you know, this
12 water is coming in your home where you live?" So I
13 have an issue with that, and I would just like to
14 know, how do they fix it? I mean, you still want
15 more money. And you're not doing anything to
16 correct the problems that exist now. So, I don't
17 see where there's a need for a raise until you can
18 really take care of what you have. I mean, just
19 like the young lady that just spoke, it's only two
20 people in our house. Two people. But we have to
21 pay a rate – and I know we don't use it – that
22 everybody else – like she said, it could be five,
23 six, seven people in one house. Everybody's paying
24 the same thing. And it would be much better if it
25 was monitored, where the amount that you use is the

1 amount that you pay. I feel like that it would be
2 a whole lot better if it was that way. And, also,
3 I need to know what to fix to keep the water – the
4 sewage from backing up in my house.

5 That's all I have.

6 [Applause]

7 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, ma'am.

8 Questions? ORS?

9 **MR. HUBER:** Ms. Lyons, I would ask that you
10 speak with our Consumer Services person in the
11 lobby, Ms. Wilhite, and see if maybe we can assist
12 you?

13 **WITNESS:** Thank you.

14 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Hang on one second, Ms.
15 Lyons.

16 First, Consumer Advocate?

17 **MR. HALL:** I have no questions.

18 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Okay. Commissioner Ervin.

19 **COMMISSIONER ERVIN:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

20 **EXAMINATION**

21 **BY COMMISSIONER ERVIN:**

22 **Q** Ms. Lyons, did you suffer any damage to your home when
23 the sewer backed up?

24 **A** Oh, I'm sure it's damaged in that wall. That's not the
25 first –

1 Q Did you have an estimate from a contractor to repair it?

2 A No, we didn't.

3 Q Yes, ma'am.

4 A And that's probably something that we should have done,
5 but that's not the first time that it – it happens all
6 the time, and we was told, because where our house is
7 located – it's at the end of right there where it all
8 goes in. And because of that, it gets – it's going to
9 back up. It's the lowest point; it's going to back up.

10 Q Yes, ma'am.

11 A So we've done everything that we know to do. We put
12 those – whatever those things is that you put in there
13 to keep – the traps, to keep it from coming in, coming
14 back. We've done everything we know to do, you know,
15 and we've been there 40-some years. We're not going
16 anywhere.

17 Q Sure.

18 A We just want –

19 Q If it happens again, I would suggest that you take
20 photographs with your camera or cell phone, or whatever
21 you have, and document it, the date and time. And also
22 get an estimate for repair, if there's damage to your
23 home, because the company really should have that
24 documentation so that they can take appropriate action
25 and perhaps reimburse you for the cost of the damage to

1 your home. But you have the responsibility to document
2 it, so I would encourage you to do that if this ever
3 happens again. But I agree with the attorney that spoke
4 up; you need to meet with the Office of Regulatory
5 Staff. There may be something they can do to help you
6 now.

7 **A** Okay, thank you.

8 **COMMISSIONER ERVIN:** Yes, ma'am.

9 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you.

10 Other Commissioners? Hang on, hang on, Ms.
11 Lyons.

12 **WITNESS:** Oh, I'm sorry.

13 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** That's okay.

14 Commissioner Belser.

15 **EXAMINATION**

16 **BY COMMISSIONER BELSER:**

17 **Q** I just want to make – is this on? I just want to make
18 sure I'm clear, Ms. Lyons, if you'll indulge me for a
19 few minutes. You're paying a flat rate for sewer?

20 **A** Yes, ma'am. We pay what everybody else pays.

21 **Q** Who provides your water?

22 **A** Granite.

23 **Q** Blue Granite?

24 **A** Yes, ma'am.

25 **Q** And that's metered? It's a volumetric charge?

1 A I guess. We – it fluctuates, so I'm sure. We're not
2 being charged a flat rate for the water.

3 Q And you said the sewer – when is the last time you had
4 this sewer-backup issue?

5 A Just last month.

6 Q January?

7 A January, yeah.

8 Q And prior to that, do you recall when it happened
9 before?

10 A No, I don't. To be – I just want to be honest about it.
11 I don't remember when, but I do know that this is not
12 the first time that we've had it. We did have some
13 extensive damage one time, where they had to go in and –
14 at that time, we had carpet and all that stuff, and they
15 had to go in and clean and all that stuff, but that's
16 been some years ago.

17 Q When you say "they," who are you talking about?

18 A The – we had someone to come out and have that done.

19 Q Y'all had it, or the company?

20 A The company reimbursed us for what we had done.

21 Q Okay. And you said your husband went down and got
22 somebody to come?

23 A Yeah, it's a – it's some type –

24 Q Like a treatment plan?

25 A – some kind of station that's down – that's not very far

1 from the house. It's less than a mile.

2 Q That Blue Granite owns.

3 A Well, it used to be United Utilities, so I guess it's
4 Blue Granite?

5 Q United Utilities was like a parent company, and then CWS
6 was like under it, a subsidiary. Now, they've changed
7 their name to Blue Granite, so –

8 A Yeah, but it's –

9 Q But Utilities, Inc., used to – anyway, I know what
10 you're talking about. But it was somebody with Blue
11 Granite?

12 A That came up –

13 Q That came up there?

14 A – to see what the issue was.

15 Q Okay. And that's the man that said it's not your issue;
16 it's –

17 A Right.

18 Q – the company's issue?

19 A Right. He said it wasn't on our side, it was where the
20 sewage – you know, the little thing there where the
21 sewage comes in and goes out? It was on the opposite –
22 it was on the road aside; it wasn't on our – on the –
23 you know, in the yard side of the house.

24 Q And were you there when Roto-Rooter or somebody came?

25 A I wasn't, because I had to go to church.

1 Q Yes, ma'am.

2 A But my husband, he was there, and he's not here tonight.

3 Q That's fine.

4 A So...

5 Q But after you got home a while later, it had cleared up
6 or you were able to –

7 A Yes, ma'am. After they pumped, it had cleared up.

8 Q And did they come into your house and help with the
9 cleanup on that occasion?

10 A No, ma'am. No, ma'am. They just do what they do, and
11 they're gone.

12 Q Thank you very much for your testimony tonight.

13 A Thank you.

14 CHAIRMAN RANDALL: Thank you, ma'am.

15 Any other questions, Commissioners?

16 [No response]

17 Thank you, Ms. Lyons. Thank you, ma'am.

18 WITNESS: Thank you.

19 [WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

20 MR. BOCKMAN: Next we have Virginia Gray?

21 Virginia Gray, followed by Andy Lawrence.

22 [Witness affirmed]

23 THEREUPON came,

24 V I R G I N I A G R A Y ,

25 who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

1 **WITNESS:** Virginia Gray. I'm a resident of
2 Canterbury subdivision.

3 My concern is the – you said a 56 percent
4 increase. Social Security only gave 1.6 percent
5 increase. Most of the people in my neighborhood
6 are seniors, and we are based on a fixed income.
7 So, if we're on a fixed income, we got 1.6 percent,
8 then Medicare went up. So we didn't get any
9 increase. So we're on a fixed income, so how can
10 we afford to go up from – I'd say we're paying \$65
11 now, up to \$101? How do we fit that into a budget
12 that we are already on? And it's like this – okay,
13 I don't know if it's because you switched names
14 that you're asking for the increase, but it seems
15 like every two years you're asking for an increase.

16 When I moved there in 1978, I paid \$8
17 bimonthly. That was affordable. Now the sewer
18 bill is about to become more than your mortgage.
19 So if it continues like this, I think we're going
20 to have a bunch of empty homes, because the sewer
21 bill is going to price people out of their homes.
22 They're going to have to find somewhere else to go
23 because they can't afford to pay it. So what are
24 you going to do, cut off the sewer, come and dig up
25 the yard, because people can't afford to pay this?

1 I mean, it's just totally absurd that you would
2 even ask for an increase of this magnitude with the
3 economy that we live in today, with the rate
4 increase that we get. I mean, I don't see – I
5 don't even see – I can understand you asking for an
6 increase, and that's easy for you to do. But it's
7 hard for us on this end to swallow that. And I'm
8 just wondering, do you all ever consider are these
9 people going to be able to pay this, or – whatever
10 you raise it to, they've got to pay it or they get
11 their yard dug up.

12 So we're already fighting between medicine,
13 groceries, and utilities. So we're going to have
14 to do without something. And I'm just asking, have
15 some empathy and deny this increase.

16 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, Ms. Gray.

17 Any questions from the company?

18 [No response]

19 ORS?

20 **CROSS EXAMINATION**

21 **BY MR. HUBER:**

22 **Q** Ms. Gray, you mentioned concerns about affordability.
23 What choices or changes do you feel like you've got to
24 make to your budget to afford these rates if they go
25 into effect?

1 **A** I'm going to have to change something. I mean, my
2 medicine bill – y'all don't want me to talk about that.
3 So, it's – it's sky-high. So that's – I've got
4 something that has to go lacking, either I'm going to
5 have to not take some medicine, not eat some food, or
6 get my yard dug up.

7 **MR. HUBER:** Thank you, ma'am.

8 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you.

9 Commissioner – oh, Consumer Affairs.

10 **MR. HALL:** Just one question.

11 **CROSS EXAMINATION**

12 **BY MR. HALL:**

13 **Q** About how many residents are in your neighborhood, do
14 you know?

15 **A** About 130.

16 **MR. HALL:** Thank you.

17 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Commissioner Belser?

18 **EXAMINATION**

19 **BY COMMISSIONER BELSER:**

20 **Q** Thank you for being here tonight, Ms. Gray. Thank you
21 for being here and for your testimony. Are you a water
22 and sewer customer of Blue Granite?

23 **A** Just the sewer.

24 **Q** Just sewer. And who's your water provider?

25 **A** Greenville Water.

1 **COMMISSIONER BELSER:** Thank you, very much. I
2 appreciate your testimony.

3 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Other questions,
4 Commissioners?

5 [No response]

6 Thank you, Ms. Gray. Appreciate you being
7 here.

8 [Applause]

9 [WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

10 **MR. BOCKMAN:** Andy Lawrence? Andy Lawrence up
11 next, please.

12 [Witness affirmed]

13 THEREUPON came,

14 **A N D Y L A W R E N C E ,**
15 who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

16 **WITNESS:** My name is Andy Lawrence. I live
17 off of West Georgia Road. I get my water from Blue
18 Granite.

19 I have three children, and I also take care of
20 my elderly mother in my house. And I have to get
21 my mom to help me pay the utilities, because the
22 rates are just so high, and she's on a fixed
23 income. We are all – I'm just trying to share
24 with, you know, my mom, and it's getting to the
25 point where it's getting ridiculous. When I heard

1 55 percent on the upper end of the water company –
2 again, I lost my job a year ago, and I had to find
3 another job, and now I'm making less than what I
4 was before and still taking care of my mom. The
5 rates keep going up. And by God's grace, we're
6 making it day-to-day, but – and he keeps providing,
7 but 55 percent is – do you really need 55 percent?
8 It just seems, like the other ones that spoke
9 earlier, seems kind of outrageous.

10 The well where we get our water from sits on
11 our property. So I'm already restricted as to what
12 I can do within so many feet of the well. So
13 you're already taking use of my property – not you,
14 but the water company. I cannot do anything within
15 100 feet of the well. So I feel like you're
16 already restricting my own property use. I pay
17 property taxes on it, and I – but I can't use it.
18 I have to call to get permission to use that part
19 of the property.

20 The price of the water is higher than city,
21 and sewer, it's – it's higher per meter, per
22 gallon, but we're not seeming to get the same
23 benefits. And when bad weather hits – one time we
24 had an ice storm hit, and this was I think two
25 years ago when a bad ice storm came through. Our

1 house had electricity; the well didn't. But we had
2 to control the use of our well – of our water
3 usage, because the other subdivisions had
4 generators to run their water. We didn't have a
5 generator to run our water. And I think that's –
6 if you're going to ask for it –

7 [3-minute signal]

8 – then use it wisely.

9 CHAIRMAN RANDALL: Thank you, Mr. Lawrence.
10 Questions?

11 **CROSS EXAMINATION**

12 **BY MR. HUBER:**

13 **Q** Mr. Lawrence, you mentioned an issue, a service issue,
14 with the ice storms a few years ago. Have you had any
15 other service issues?

16 **A** Not since then, no, sir.

17 **MR. HUBER:** Thank you for speaking tonight.

18 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you.

19 Consumer Advocate?

20 **MR. HALL:** No, sir.

21 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Commissioners?

22 **EXAMINATION**

23 **BY COMMISSIONER BELSER:**

24 **Q** Mr. Lawrence, I'd just like to clarify: When was that
25 issue with the ice storm and not having a generator to

1 run the well, do you recall?

2 **A** I do not recall. We've only been out there four years
3 and I think it was about two years ago. They said that
4 it was a huge ice storm that went all the way down to
5 Columbia, and they had many other wells that had to
6 have – that had power outages, and they had to supply
7 other places instead of ours. We have a 5000-gallon
8 storage tank, and they were just going with usage of
9 what was on that well at that time.

10 **Q** Okay. The company has a 5000-gallon –

11 **A** Correct.

12 **Q** – storage tank; is that correct?

13 **A** That is correct.

14 **Q** Is that on your property?

15 **A** That is on my property, yes.

16 **Q** And you're paying property taxes on the property? Are
17 you paying –

18 **A** I pay property tax. I pay \$1800 property tax every
19 year, and it's on my property.

20 **Q** Okay. And do they have an easement to access it?

21 **A** They do.

22 **Q** Thank you for being here. I appreciate your testimony
23 tonight.

24 **A** Thank you.

25 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you.

Commissioners, other questions?

[No response]

Thank you, Mr. Lawrence. Appreciate you being here.

[Applause]

[WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

MR. BOCKMAN: Mr. Chairman, with the conclusion of Mr. Lawrence's testimony, that is everyone who's signed up to speak this evening.

CHAIRMAN RANDALL: Thank you.

I want to thank everyone for coming tonight. We appreciate you being here and to let us be here. I want to remind you, if you have issues, to contact the Office of Regulatory Staff. Also, the company's here and you can speak with any of them tonight. So thank you for being here, and we are adjourned.

[WHEREUPON, at 6:37 p.m., the hearing in the above-entitled matter was adjourned, to reconvene on February 26, 2020, at 10:00 a.m., in Columbia, South Carolina.]

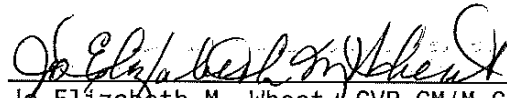
[WHEREUPON, Hearing Exhibit No. 10 was marked and received in evidence.]

C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Jo Elizabeth M. Wheat, CVR-CM-GNSC, Notary Public in and for the State of South Carolina, do hereby certify that the foregoing is, to the best of my skill and ability, a true and correct transcript of all the proceedings had and testimony adduced in a public evening hearing held in the above-captioned matter before the PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION OF SOUTH CAROLINA;

That the witnesses appearing during said hearing were sworn or affirmed to state the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth;

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and seal, on this the 12th day of March, 2020.


 Jo Elizabeth M. Wheat, CVR-CM/M-GNSC
 Hearings Reporter, PSC/SC
 My Commission Expires: January 27, 2021.